

SOCIAL NORMING FOR TOBACCO CONTROL AMONG UNITED STATES SOLDIERS

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• <http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/dhpw/Population/TobaccoCessation.aspx>



Objective To use social norming methods to identify and correct misperceptions about tobacco use among newly enlisted U.S. Army personnel.

Methods A three phase tobacco control intervention focused on Army personnel in Advanced Individual Training (AIT) at Aberdeen Proving Ground was developed.

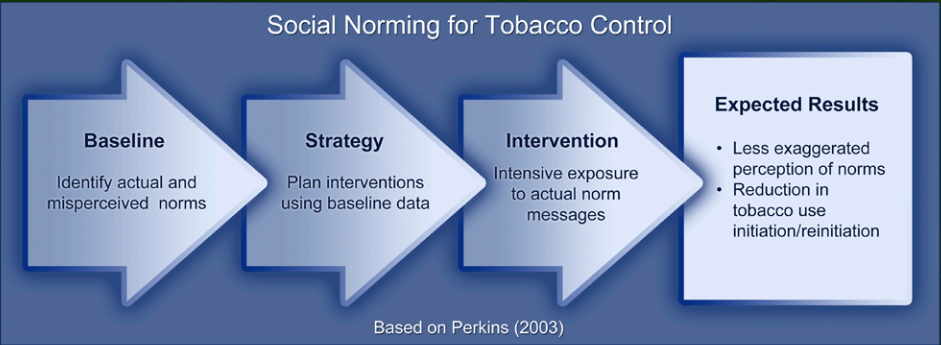
1. Baseline: Collect data on the perceptions of and use of tobacco products.
2. Intervention: Develop and implement a tobacco counter-marketing campaign focusing on identified misperceptions.
3. Outcomes will be surveyed to determine the effectiveness of the counter-marketing campaign in changing misperceptions and decreasing the use of tobacco products.

Results Baseline data identified that individuals actually thought about aspects of tobacco use behavior.

1. Most agree that people who smoke cigarettes even occasionally are addicted to nicotine.
2. Most agree that people who use smokeless tobacco are addicted.
3. Most AIT students would rather socialize in a smoke free environment.
4. Over half believe that Soldiers' smoking habits have caused a major problem at AIT.
5. Most AIT students would rather date a non-smoker.
6. A tobacco counter-marketing campaign is under development.

This proposal was found to be exempt by the Office of Research Protections, USAMRMC, under 32 CFR 219.101(b)(2). Proposal number CHPPM-0146-05, HSRRB Log Number A-13552.

Positive behavior change can be encouraged through social norming. Soldiers in Advanced Individual Training are the target population for a media campaign to identify and correct misperceptions about tobacco use among Soldiers. The campaign provides accurate information to support both tobacco use prevention and cessation.



Problem Statement

Smoking Prevalence

Nearly two-thirds of military smokers report having started smoking before joining the military (Bray et al., 2003). Despite bans on the use of tobacco products, tobacco use rates are very high among junior enlisted personnel (Bray et al, 2003). According to the 2002 Department of Defense Survey of Health Related Behaviors Among Military Personnel (Bray et al, 2003) 47.6 % of male Army personnel aged 18-25 years reported cigarette smoking over the past 30 days, compared to 42% in a comparative civilian population. Cigarette smoking is also a common cause for Article 15 disciplinary action during AIT, indicating that some Soldiers smoke during this time even though smoking is officially prohibited.

Smoking Linked to DNBI

Smoking has been linked to a higher risk for musculoskeletal overuse injuries among Army personnel (Amoroso et al., 1996). Musculoskeletal injuries among active duty Army personnel cause more lost and limited duty days than all other outpatient conditions combined (Jones & Knapik, 1999). A stress fracture can account for over 100 lost duty days, and an overuse injury can result in several weeks of limited duty time.

Tobacco-related costs reduce military readiness by diverting money away from equipment, training, and additional personnel.

Social Norming

Counter-marketing activities, like social norming, have been shown to promote smoking cessation and decrease the likelihood of initiation. Research has supported that correcting misperceptions about social groups can actually bring about behavior change.

Social Norming Approach to Address Tobacco Use Among AIT Soldiers at Aberdeen Proving Ground

Baseline Data (Survey data from Spring/Summer 2005)

1. Two out of three AIT students at Aberdeen do not smoke every day.
2. Nearly one out of every two AIT students at Aberdeen thinks that tobacco use is never good.
3. Most AIT students at Aberdeen agree that people who smoke cigarettes even occasionally are addicted to nicotine.
4. Most AIT students at Aberdeen agree that people who use smokeless tobacco even occasionally are addicted to nicotine.
5. Most AIT students at Aberdeen believe that tobacco is addictive and people who smoke or use smokeless tobacco should be confronted and offered treatment, much like we do for an alcoholic.
6. Most AIT students at Aberdeen would rather socialize in a smoke free environment.
7. Over half of the AIT students at Aberdeen believe that Soldiers' smoking habits have caused a major problem at AIT.
8. Most AIT students at Aberdeen would rather date a non-smoker.

Strategy (Under development and due out FEB 2006)

- Identify high-traffic areas for enlisted personnel
- Collaborate with line commanders
- Use available communication channels

Interventions (Based on misperceptions identified from Baseline Data)

- Posters/placards in high-traffic areas (such as entry/exit, day room, latrine, telephone) stating normative tobacco use behavior specific to group
- Posters/placards in dining area stating positive effects of being tobacco-free
- Posters/placards in latrines stating positive effects of being tobacco-free
- Emphasize availability of tobacco use cessation services
- Verbal announcements by peer leaders

Expected Results

- Reduced misperception of tobacco use norms
- Reduction in tobacco use initiation/reinitiation

References

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